Ages could provide. For many years to come, there was very little to differentiate Catholic from Protestant Europe, so far as their treatment of the Jews was concerned; and, if the latter subsequently changed its policy, originally the reason lay in considerations of economics and expedience rather than in abstract, disinterested toleration.

It is thus misleading to speak of a direct Jewish influence upon the Reformation.[1] Yet the influence upon it of Jewish scholarship, and hence of individual Jewish scholars, was far from negligible. As has been pointed out, the Reformation was based upon the rejection of Catholic tradition in favour of the authority of the Bible and the removal from the latter of the glosses by means of which (as the Reformers claimed) the Church of the Middle Ages had attempted to maintain its ascendancy over religious thought. But the Bible was available to the western world only in its official Catholic version, the Vulgate; it was the Jews alone who possessed the Hebrew original and the key to its interpretation. Hence, just as Italian savants applied to Greek scholars for guidance in their researches into Plato, so German theologians applied to Jewish Rabbis for assistance in understanding the Hebrew Scriptures. It was only a coincidence, perhaps, that the intellectual clash in Germany began with an attempt on the part of the Dominicans to suppress the Talmud, which was doughtily championed by Johannes von Reuchlin;

yet it was

[1] An exception is to be made only as regards the Marranos, or crypto-Jews of Spain and Portugal. Compulsorily converted to Catholicism, they could not be expected to appreciate its spirituality; yet in many cases they entirely lacked Jewish knowledge and loyalties. They were hence a particularly favourable soil for the Reformed doctrine, and played an important part in its propagation in Flanders. Thus Marc Perez, the Calvinist leader at Antwerp in the middle of the sixteenth century, was of Jewish extraction, as were many of his coadjutors.